

"Taking a Gamble":

Navigating Indigenous Identity, Recognition, and Gaming in Southeastern Connecticut

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Introduction

Key Research Questions:

- What role has Federal Recognition played in Southeastern Connecticut?
- How have aspects of culture and identity been questioned internally and externally while living and operating in a Settler Capitalistic Society?

Key Findings:

- Indian Gaming has weaponized Federal Recognition in Connecticut and across the United States.
- Museums have allowed tribes to celebrate their culture and heritage while claiming their Indigeneity.
- Constructs of race continue to divide Native peoples.
- Through Federal Recognition, Natives in theory, are given autonomy but state and federal governments attempt to control and suppress Native economic/cultural efforts.



Image (right) courtesy of the Norwich Bulletin
Image (left) courtesy of New York Times



Mashantucket Pequots

The Pequots were deemed extinct by the 1638 Treaty of Hartford following the Pequot War and either sold into slavery in the Caribbean, given as tribute to English allied tribes (such as the Mohegan), or ran away.

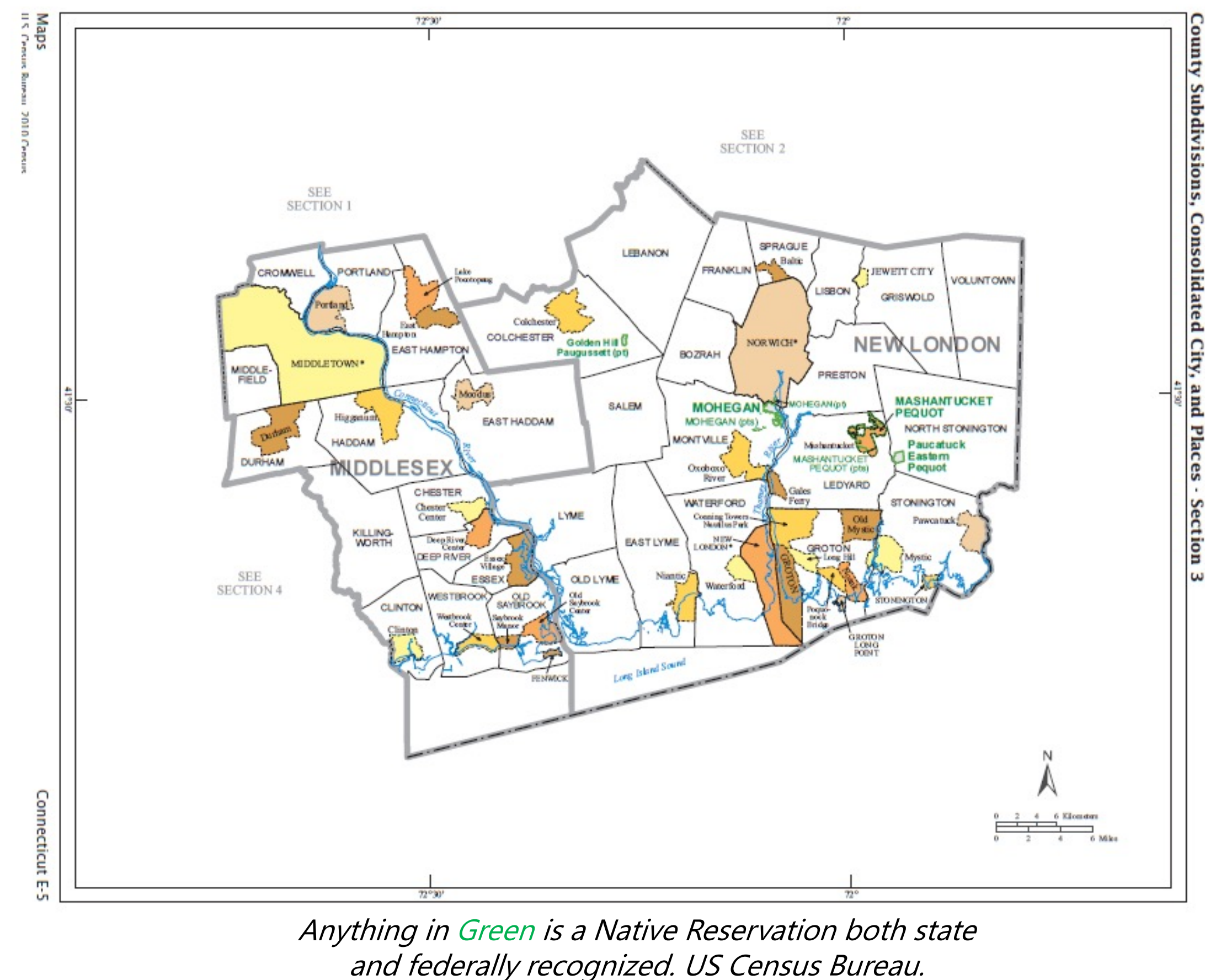
Shortly after the 1650s the Pequots that remained in the area split into the Western (Mashantuckets) and the Eastern.

The Western Reservation was in talks of becoming a state park in 1972 when the last Pequot died. However, Skip Hayward and his family moved onto the reservation and filed land claims about the illegal seizure of their tribe's land.

In 1983 Federal Recognition was granted through an Act of Congress. The tribe received \$900,000 and 800 acres. The Mashantuckets extended their new citizenship to Pequots living among the Narragansetts of Rhode Island.

In 1986 the tribe found economic success in a Bingo Hall which was able avoid state laws and regulations due to it being on the reservation. Following this success in 1992 the tribe opened Foxwoods Resort Casino.

In 1998 Hayward unveiled the Pequot Museum, the largest Native Museum in the United States, it served as a testament of the survival of the Pequot. Later that year Hayward was pushed out from his leadership position overclaims of racism from the Narragansett faction of Mashantuckets.



Anything in Green is a Native Reservation both state and federally recognized. US Census Bureau.

Key Terms

➤ Guardianship/Guardians

- Created in Colonial period where white overseers were appointed to manage Native Affairs. Replaced traditional tribal leadership and systems

➤ Federal Recognition

- "A federally recognized tribe is an American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entity that is recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States... recognized as possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States."
(Bureau of Indian Affairs)



Right- Fildelia Fielding, last fluent Mohegan-Pequot Speaker. Cornell University.

Top Left- Len Olijar, Lynn Malerba, and Janet Yellen. Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

Bottom Left- Tonto Francis, middle unknown, and Richard "Skip" Hayward. The Day Paper.

Key Sources/Evidence

Primary Sources:

- Fielding Diaries and Occum Letters
- *Lasting of the Mohegans* by Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel
- Uncas Belt and Uncas' Wampum Collar
- 1790 Non-Intercourse Act
- Family Letters and Documents from 1860s-2000s
- *Bad Indians* by Deborah Miranda

Secondary Sources:

- *Firsting and Lasting* by Jean O'Brien
- *Revenge of the Pequots* by Kim Isaac Eisler
- "Mohegan Women, the Mohegan Church, and the Lasting of the Mohegan Nation" by Bethany Berger and Chloe Scherpa



Images courtesy of the Mohegan Tribe Webpage



Mohegans

The Mohegans originated as a subdivision of the Pequots and split over disagreements on engagement with European traders.

Uncas, their first leader, used his position with the English following the Pequot War to protect his people and lands through a trust. The Mason Family were the first guardians of the tribe.

By 1861, of the sixty-two people who resided on the Mohegan Reservation, fourteen were non-native, and only four were full-blooded Mohegan. In 1872 the Guardianship was ended, and the detribalization began.

In 1931 the Tantaquidgeon Museum opened in Uncasville where locals and visitors alike could learn about the Mohegan people.

In 1994 the Mohegans gained Federal Recognition. Through historical evidence they become recognized and were only the ninth tribe to successfully do so.

Mohegan Sun opened in 1996 in coordination with the Mashantuckets waving their exclusivity contract with the state of Connecticut over gaming rights.

In 2020 Fildelia Fielding's Diaries (taken by anthropologist Frank Speck) were returned from Cornell to the Tribe under NAGPRA. In 2022 Chief Many Hearts, Lynn Malerba, of the Mohegan Tribe was sworn in as Treasurer of the United States.